NOAA Web Update June 11, 2010
DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident

Situation: Friday 11 June —

Collection of oil and gas leaking into the Gulf of Mexico from the MC 252 well seems to have leveled off. The amount of oil being collected via the 'top hat' operation was approximately 15,400 barrels yesterday and about the same the day before. The transfer of crude oil from the drillship to the barge *Massachusetts*, a process known as lightering, began the morning of June 9. The operation should be complete by tomorrow morning and the barge will transport the oil for discharge at an onshore terminal. Late this month, BP intends to increase surface processing capacity by re-plumbing the top hat system so it can be routed to tankers. BP is moving forward with plans to connect risers to ports on the side of the blow out preventer. The risers will be connected to the Q4000 rig used in the top kill procedure. The operation is expected to collect 5,000-10,000 additional barrels of oil per day, which will be burned at the Q4000 rig.

BP is also continuing efforts to connect a new free-standing riser to the top hat. The new riser will connect to the containment cap on the well, and will be held in the water by a canister suspended about 300 feet beneath the water's surface. This system should be ready by next month and will allow the surface collection ship to disconnect if a hurricane threatens, and reconnect after the storm passes.

Response

There are a total of 24,000 staff currently working to support response efforts in the field. These staff are supporting a wide range of functions including oil cleanup operations, natural resource damage assessment, source control, and seafood safety.

Trajectories

In the near shore areas, onshore (SE/SSE) winds are forecast to continue through Friday at 10 knots or less. Persistent southwesterly winds last week resulted in northward movement of the oil towards the Mississippi/Alabama barrier islands and westward movement along the Florida Panhandle. Models show alongshore currents becoming more westward over the next few days, inhibiting further eastward movement. However, coastal regions in Mississippi Sound west of Pensacola may continue to experience oiling on shorelines. The change to persistent southeasterly winds is also resulting in movement of oil towards Chandeleur and Breton Sound and the Mississippi Delta.

Offshore, satellite imagery analysis continues to indicate possible patches of sheen to the SE of the main slick. Scattered sheens and tar balls observed in these regions may be getting entrained into the northern edge of the large clockwise eddy (Eddy Franklin) that has pinched off the main Loop Current (LC). Trajectories indicate that some of these sheens may continue

southward along the eastern edge of Eddy Franklin, whereas some may be getting entrained into a counterclockwise eddy to the NE of the main LC eddy. A USCG overflight off the west coast of Florida saw no oil. Satellite imagery from yesterday saw a possible sheen SE of the source. Uncertainty of this anomaly was medium to high.

Closures

NOAA Fisheries Service is not modifying the fishery closure in the Gulf of Mexico today. Any changes to the closure are announced daily at 12 p.m. Eastern at sero.nmfs.noaa.gov and take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern the same day.

Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals (effective June 10, 2010)

A total of 351 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to June 10 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Wednesday June 9, and Thursday June 10, 16 dead turtle strandings were verified (15 from Mississippi and one from Louisiana). On Thursday, the turtle search and rescue operation led by NOAA, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and other partners working under the Wildlife Branch of the Unified Command collected three live heavily-oiled sea turtles and one dead heavily-oiled sea turtle from the Gulf of Mexico. The live turtles were brought for cleaning and rehabilitation to the Audubon Wildlife Center outside New Orleans. They joined 25 other live captured turtles from previous Unified Command on-water rescues already in rehabilitation. A total of 42 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include the 34 captured turtles from the on-water operation (28 living, three collected dead and three died in rehab), four live stranded sea turtles (two caught in skimming operations) and four dead stranded sea turtles. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 351 turtles verified from April 30 to June 10, a total of 293 stranded turtles were found dead, 24 stranded alive. Three of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles have been released, and 17 live stranded turtles are being cared for at rehabilitation centers. There are a total of 45 turtles in rehabilitation. Turtle strandings during this time period have been higher in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle than in previous years for this same time period. This may be due in part to increased detection and reporting, but this does not fully account for the increase.

From April 30 to June 10, 39 stranded dolphins have been verified in the designated spill area. Of these, 37 dolphins stranded dead and two stranded alive. One of those dolphins died on the beach and the other that stranded alive in Florida was euthanized. So far, two of the 39 stranded dolphins had evidence of external oil. However, we are unable at this time to determine whether the animals were externally oiled before or after death. Since April 30, the stranding rate for dolphins in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle has been higher than the historic numbers for the same time period in previous years. In part, this may be due to increased detection and reporting and the lingering effects of an earlier observed spike in strandings for the winter of 2010.

A stranding is defined as a dead or debilitated animal that washes ashore or is found in the water. NOAA and its partners are analyzing the cause of death for the dead stranded and dead captured sea turtles and the stranded marine mammals.

Assessment

NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) is conducting a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (PDF, 89 K). The focus currently is to assemble existing data on resources and their habitats and collect baseline (pre-spill impact) data. Data on oiled resources and habitats are also being collected.